

VZCZCXRO8198
PP RUEHBZ RUEH DU RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHTRO
DE RUEHUJA #0710/01 1141157
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241157Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ABUJA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5837
INFO RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS PRIORITY 1202
RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0222
SUSTEL/AMEMBASSY BISSAU 0002
RUEHPC/AMEMBASSY LOME 0161
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1833
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE 0782
RUEAHQA/AFRICA CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 000710

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DEPT FOR INL
BAGHDAD FOR DMCCULLOUGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2019

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SUBJECT: ECOWAS: AMBASSADOR YATES MEETS WITH ECOWAS' CHAMBAS

REF: A. PRAIA 65

[1](#)B. ABUJA

Classified By: Political Counselor Walter N.S. Pflaumer for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On April 21, visiting Africom Deputy Commander Ambassador Mary Carlin Yates met with ECOWAS President Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas to discuss regional affairs and the next steps in cooperation between Africom and ECOWAS. Ambassador Sanders, ECOWAS Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace, and Security Colonel Mahamane Toure, Poloff (notetaker), and Marine Attache were also present. The discussion covered Africa Command's possible plans to help develop the maritime component of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), progress in implementing Security Sector Reform (SSR) in Guinea-Bissau, and support for helping Togo to develop its democratic institutions. The tone of the conversation was warm and frank, and illustrates the incremental growth of trust between ECOWAS and Africom. END SUMMARY.

Maritime Security

[1](#)2. (C) On April 21, Ambassador Yates met with ECOWAS President Mohamed Ibn Chambas to discuss recent events in West Africa and the future of cooperation between Africa Command and ECOWAS. In response to the admiration Ambassador Yates expressed for the rapid ongoing formation of the ESF, Chambas acknowledged that ECOWAS member states had a long way to go to develop the ability to respond to the destabilizing threats posed by illegal fishing, narcotics smuggling, and human trafficking. Commending Ambassador Yates on the inclusion of regional shipriders in the current visit of the USS Nashville to the region as a part of Africa Partnership Station (APS), Chambas expressed interest in Ambassador Sanders' suggestion to include an ECOWAS shiprider in future APS tours as a way of promoting the development of ESF's maritime capabilities. Ambassador Sanders mentioned that Post's new Naval Attache position had been created partially with assistance to the ESF in mind, and Ambassador Yates

added that she would raise with Africom Commander General Ward the possibility of adding an ESF member to Africom's staff. Chambas enthusiastically affirmed the idea, and noted his caution that the other African regional organizations would also want a similar slot, but that ECOWAS should be first.

Guinea-Bissau

13. (C) Chambas then mentioned the recent conference in Cape Verde (reftel), designed to coordinate Security Sector Reform (SSR) efforts for Guinea-Bissau among international donors. He said that the time for talking was done, and that a concrete plan of action must be drawn from the discussion. Based on the results of a census of Guinea-Bissau's armed forces, he anticipated the need for a "golden handshake" retirement package and/or pension to remove from the scene soldiers who would only hamper SSR efforts. He said that ECOWAS had pledged 5 million dollars as seed money to any eventual pension fund. New, ethnically balanced armed forces could then be stood up, similar to efforts in Liberia. Responding to Ambassador Yates' inquiry about the potential of these ex-soldiers to create mayhem while in the pay of Bissau's notorious narcotraffickers, Chambas somewhat breezily dismissed that possibility, saying they would be "sidelined, with no weapons or institutional backing." He noted that ECOWAS has thus far pledged its support for an action plan for Guinea-Bissau's SSR, and the expected

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substantial additional contributions from the international community. He asked rhetorically that if Mexico and Colombia as "capable states" could not win their drug wars, what chance did West African states have against these same traffickers? He also eagerly assented to Ambassador Sanders' offer to have Post's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement officer meet with his ECOWAS staff working on anti-corruption issues.

Togo

14. (C) Finally, Chambas said that he was pleased with the pace and direction of Togo's efforts to strengthen its democratic institutions and move away from the military rule of the past. He said that Togolese President Faure Gnassingbe was a reformer who must work hard to "fight the elements that would return Togo to its (military-dominated) past," and said his upcoming visit on April 21 was intended to be a show of support for the President. Togo also needs the international community's help in SSR efforts, he noted, saying that the situation was precarious and that Togo was possibly still vulnerable to another coup. He hoped, though, that those thirsting for power would realize that next year's elections gave them the chance to vie for it legally. Chambas agreed with Ambassador Yates that Togo had a lot of work to do in policing its borders, especially against Colombians who are using Togo as a narcotics smuggling base.

15. (C) COMMENT: Chambas seems to welcome what Africa Command has to offer, and is enthusiastic to expand its role in the region. This is a welcome change from the past two years, when he, like many of ECOWAS member states' leaders, was openly expressing reservations about the intentions behind the creation of the new command. Programs like APS and the Africa Center for Strategic Studies are showing their value and promise hope to a region seemingly at sea in the face of overwhelming problems. While the "Africom brand" still must be handled with care in the region, especially in Nigeria, the prognosis for future military cooperation is good. We may be finally reaching the end to the West African region's concern about the intentions of the Command and finally be on the road to this worry being a thing of the past. END

COMMENT.

16. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.
SANDERS